

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 03715 211136Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PEPR, PN VE
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA PRAISES PASSAGE OF CANAL TREATIES

1. LOCAL PRESS OF APRIL 19 HEADLINED APPROVAL OF PANAMA CANAL TREATIES. SURPRISINGLY, LITTLE EDITORIAL COMMENT FOLLOWED WITH EXCEPTION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY JOURNAL LEAD EDITORIAL READING "DEMOCRACY WORKS AGAIN." IN PRAISING THE TREATIES, IT NOTED THAT "THESE ARE NOT PERFECT TREATIES... BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THEM IS NOT THEIR PHRASING BUT THEIR INTENTION".

2. PRESIDENT PEREZ IN PRESS STATEMENTS APRIL 19, CALLED THE TREATY APPROVAL "A TRIUMPH FOR LATIN AMERICAN AND MORE A TRIUMPH FOR THE HEMISPHERE." HE SAID THE APPROVAL "ERASES FROM HISTORY A STAIN UPON THAT GREAT NATION WHICH MAINTAINED A LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY IN COLONIAL STATUS." FONMIN CONSALVI ADDED THAT THE CANAL TREATIES "ENDED A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY IN LATIN AMERICA."

3. COMMENT: PRIVATELY, THERE WAS ALMOST A SIGH OF RELIEF FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND PRESIDENT PEREZ AFTER THE SENATE VOTE. ALL ALONG, PEREZ HAS BEEN CONFIDENT THAT THE
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TREATIES, DESPITE DIFFICULT SLEDDING, WOULD ULTIMATELY WIN APPROVAL. THE DE CONCINI AMENDMENT, HOWEVER, QUITE SEVERELY SHOOK PEREZ' CONFIDENCE. THE APPREHENSION OVER THE FATE OF THE CANAL ISSUE WAS COMPOUNDED BY A GROWING SENSE OF HELPLESSNESS ON THE PART OF PEREZ, WHO MORE THAN ANY OTHER LATIN AMERICAN LEADER HAS MADE PANAMA A MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE AND PUT HIS OWN PRESTIGE ON THE LINE WITH HIS ACTIVIST

ADVISORY ROLE DURING THE NEGOTIATION AND RATIFICATION PROCESS.
THE GOV.,AND PEREZ IN PARTICULAR, HAD ALWAYS CONSIDERED THE
CANAL TREATIES THE SINE QUA NON OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE US AND LATIN AMERICA. PASSAGE OF THE TREATIES HAS
AVERTED WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN ALMOST CERTAIN DETERIORATION
OF RELATIONS WITH VENEZUELA AND THE UNDERMINING OF THE
ADMINISTRATION'S CREDIBILITY (AS WELL AS THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN PEREZ AND PRESIDENT CARTER). RATHER THAN
JUBILATION, THE VENEZUELAN REACTION TO THE APPROVAL OF THE
CANAL TREATIES WAS ONE OF SATISFACTION AND RELIEF, TOGETHER
WITH A SENSE OF "LET'S GET ON TO OTHER THINGS."
VAKY

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Message Attributes

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